



Primary to secondary school transition: Views and voices from English teachers across three European contexts

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Background

ERASMUS +



iBUILD IT

A roadmap to success



Innovating & Building
Understanding to Improve
Language Development with
Information Technology

Goal:

Address the “gap” in ELT between primary and secondary education and to design practical guidelines that schools could use to help their transition learners



Introduction



Continuity between primary and secondary school has been a recurring challenge since the very first early FL programs were launched (Johnstone, 2009)

“Continuation in secondary schools is a problem everywhere in Europe except in some countries such as Finland [...]. I would say not one country is completely successful in ensuring the transition to secondary.”

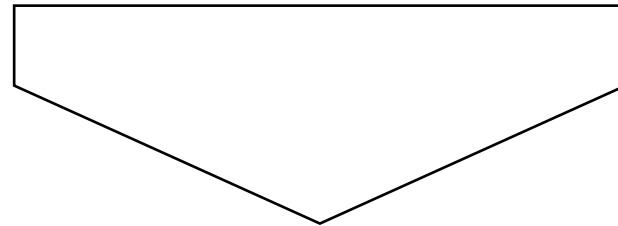
(Nikolov, 2009, p. 42)



Graham & Hill, 2003
Bolster et al., 2004
Burwitz-Melzer & Legutke,
2004
Jones, 2010
Hunt et al., 2008
Kolb, 2011
Burns et al., 2013
Chambers, 2014
Colleen, 2016
Courtney, 2017
Pfenninger & Singleton, 2017

Challenges

- Poor communication between primary and secondary schools
- Shift in pedagogy
- Lack of differentiated instruction in secondary school
- Teachers' lack of understanding of curricula of other school forms
- Limited formal training in FL teaching among primary school teachers



Motivational issues among YLLs, disruptions of their language learning progressions



Transfer experiences are closely related to YLLs' learning environment

Teachers have a central role in the transition process
(Burns et al., 2014)



Graham & Hill, 2003

Bolster et al., 2004

Burwitz-Melzer & Legutke,
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Jones, 2010

Hunt et al., 2008

Kolb, 2011

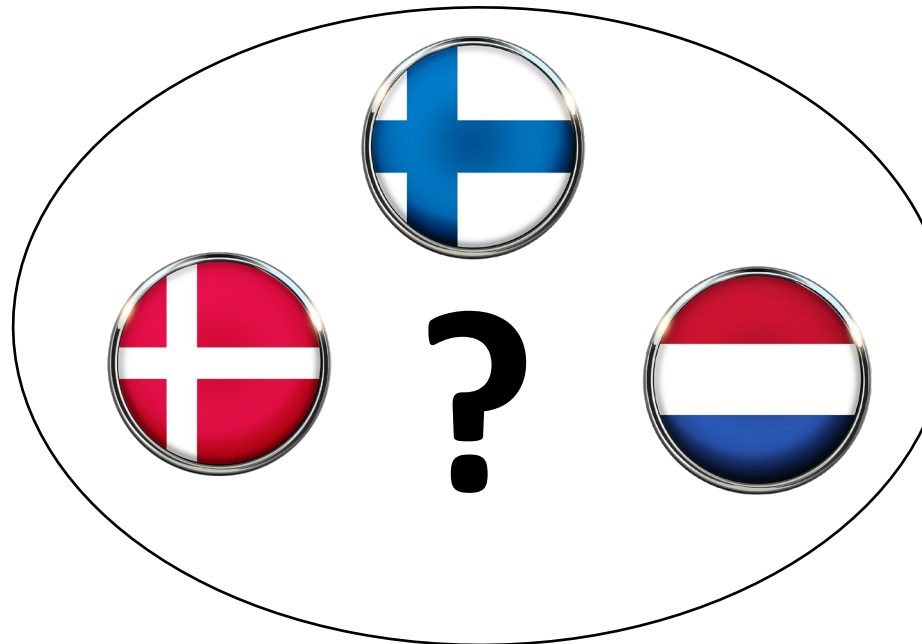
Burns et al., 2013

Chambers, 2014

Colleen, 2016

Courtney, 2017

Pfenninger & Singleton, 2017



Research Questions



1. What are the teachers' perceptions relative to the transition from English language learning (ELL) in primary school to ELL in secondary school across the three countries?
2. How do teachers cope with potential challenges related to the transition when teaching English in the first year of secondary school?

The contexts



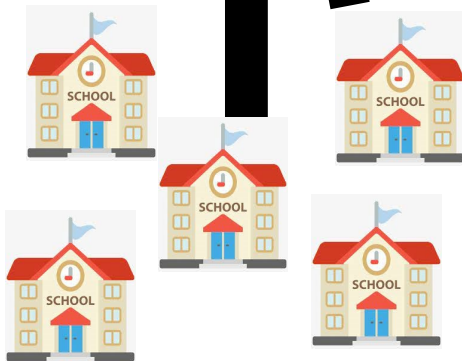
Secondary
education

Grades
7-up



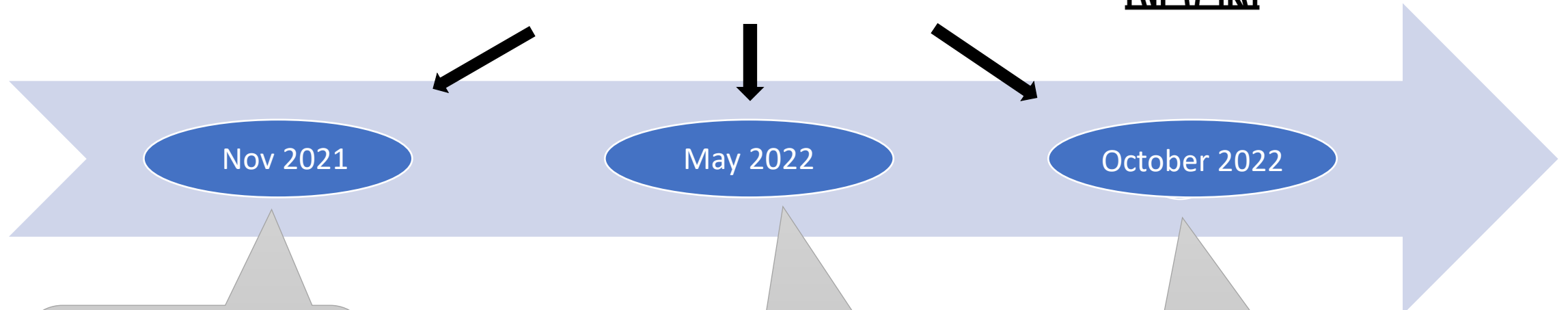
Primary
education

Grades
1-6



Methodology

Online survey
&
Focus groups
(in person & zoom)



Nov 2021

May 2022

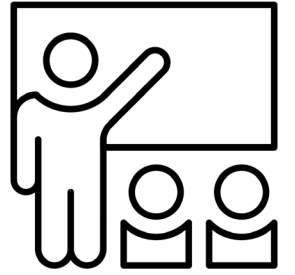
October 2022

Primary & secondary
school teachers
N=17

Primary school
teachers
n=8

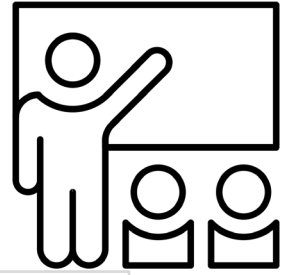
Secondary school
teachers
n=9

Participating teachers



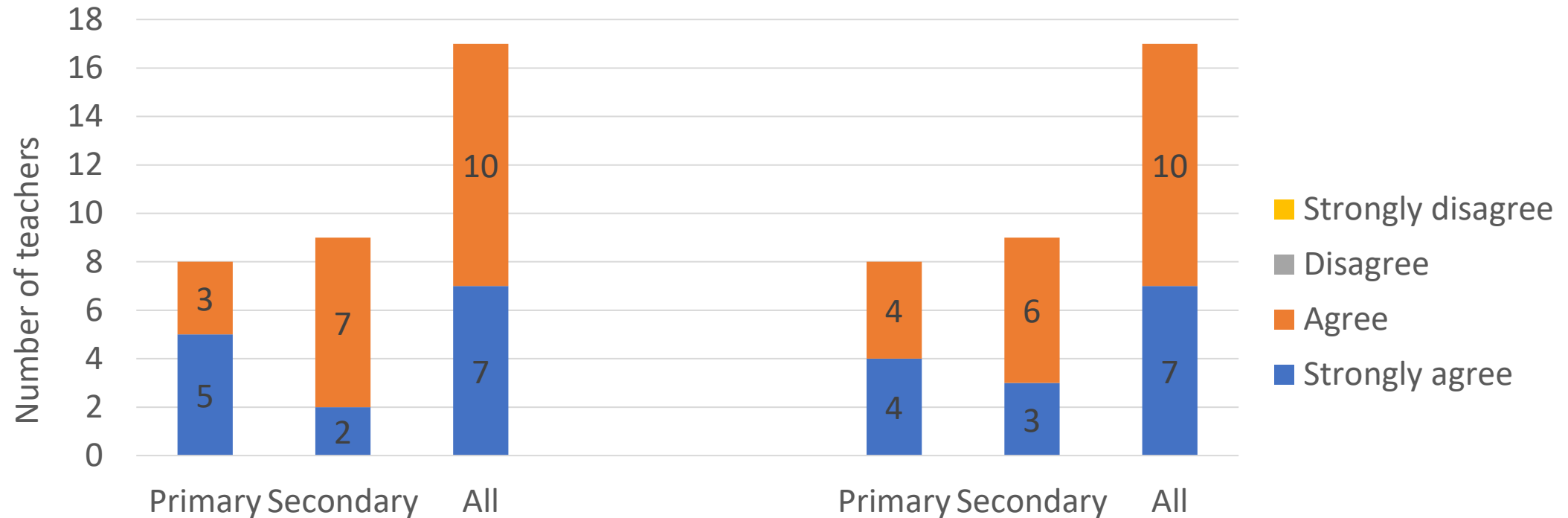
	All	Primary school	Secondary school
<i>N</i>	17	8	9
Gender			
Male	1	1	0
Female	16	7	9
Country			
NL	6	2	4
DK	6	3	3
FIN	5	3	2
Age			
Mean	38.25	34.25	43
Range	24-54 years	24-47 years	29-54 years
Number of years teaching English			
Mean (SD)	10.24	6.63	13.44
Range	1-25 years	1-14 years	3-25 years
Education (highest degree)			
Bachelor	8	4	4
Master	8	4	4
PhD	1	0	1

Participating teachers (cont.)

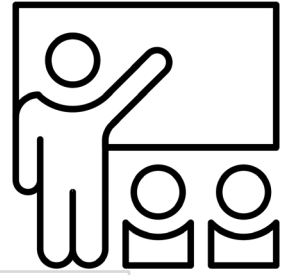


I feel confident communicating in English.

I feel confident teaching English to my students.



Participating teachers (cont.)



I feel confident communicating in English to my students.

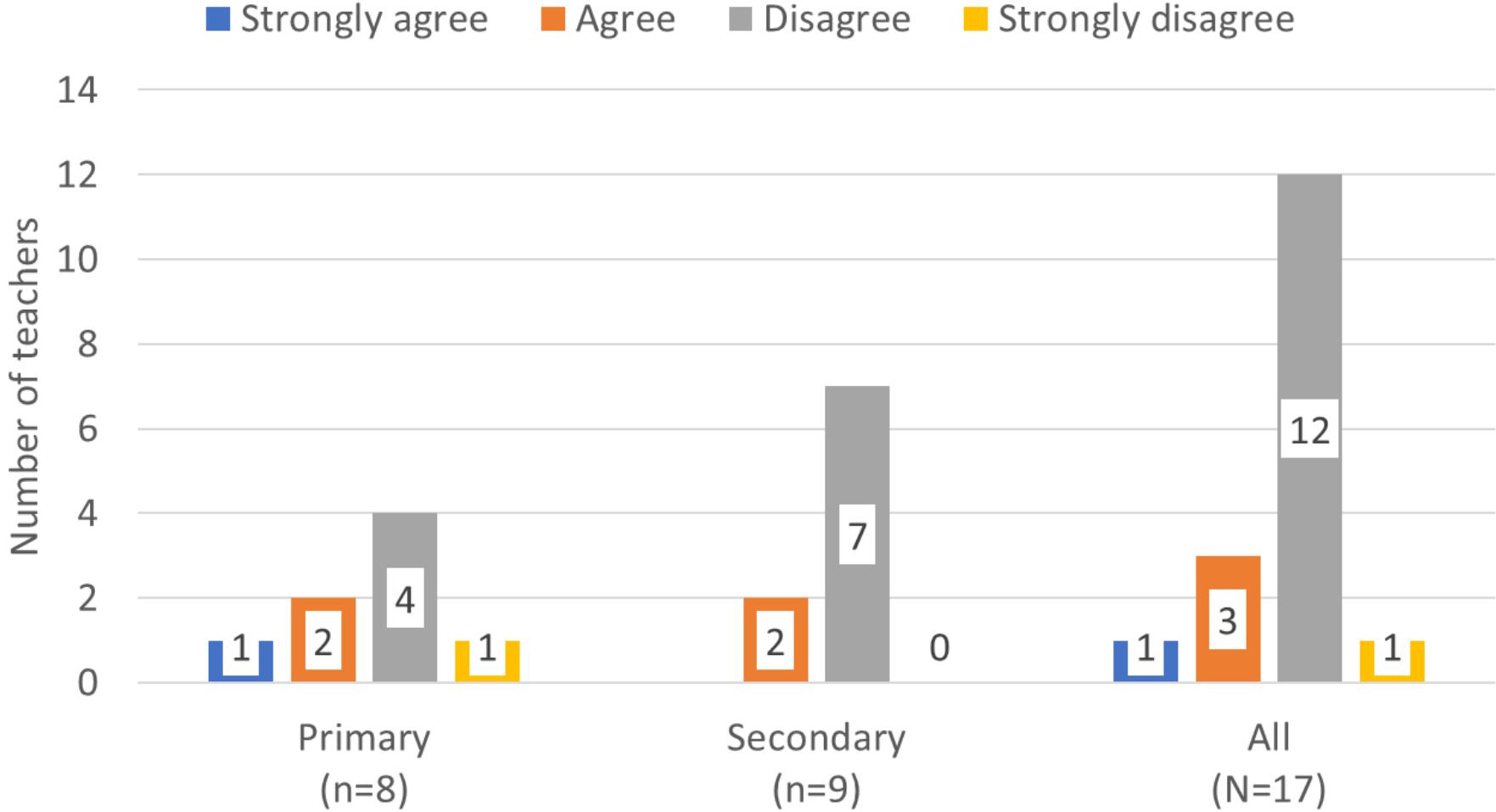




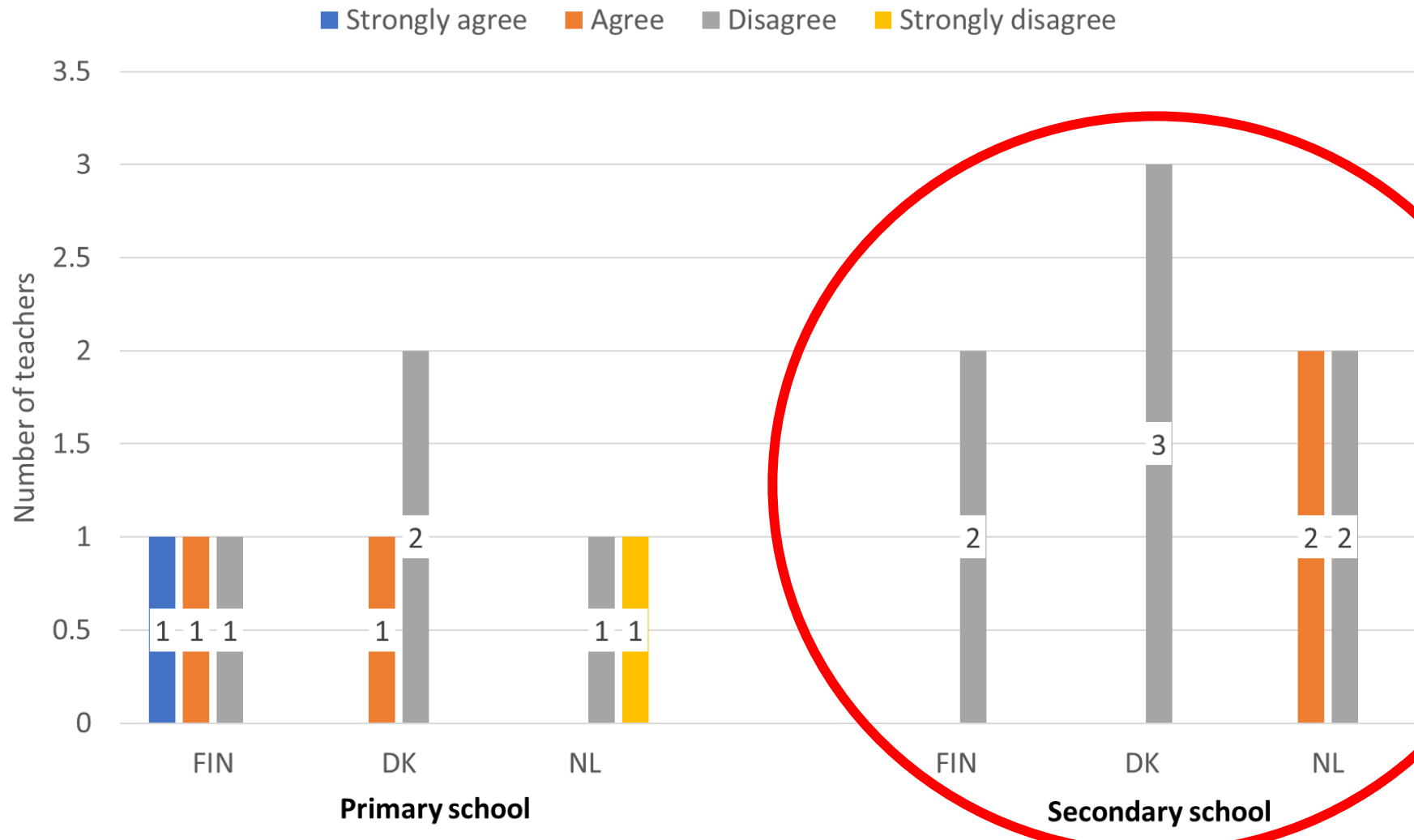
RQ1:

What are the teachers' perceptions relative to the transition from English language learning (ELL) in primary school to ELL in secondary school?

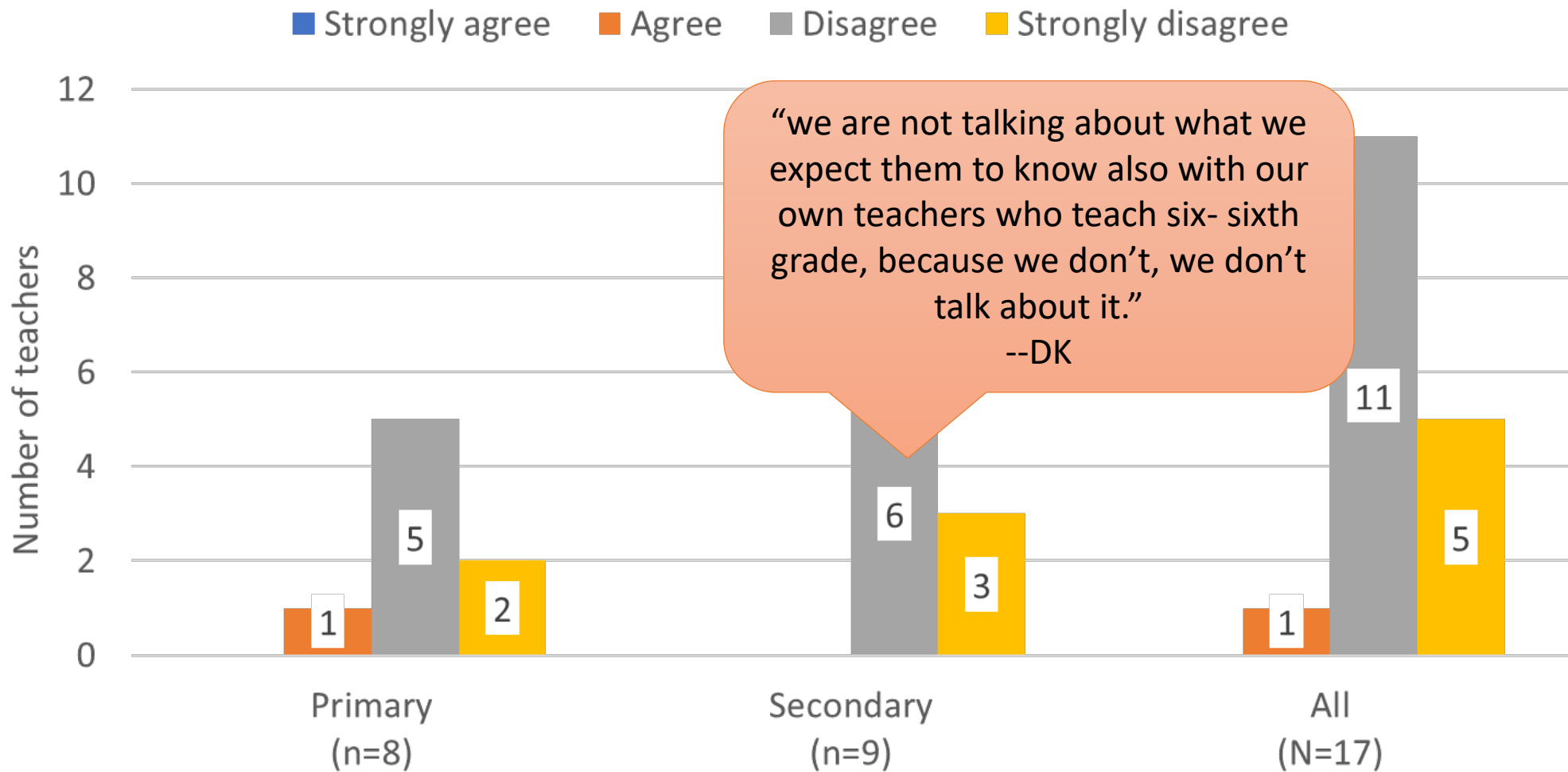
The transition between primary and secondary English classes is well organized.



**By country & school form:
The transition between primary and secondary English classes is well organized.**



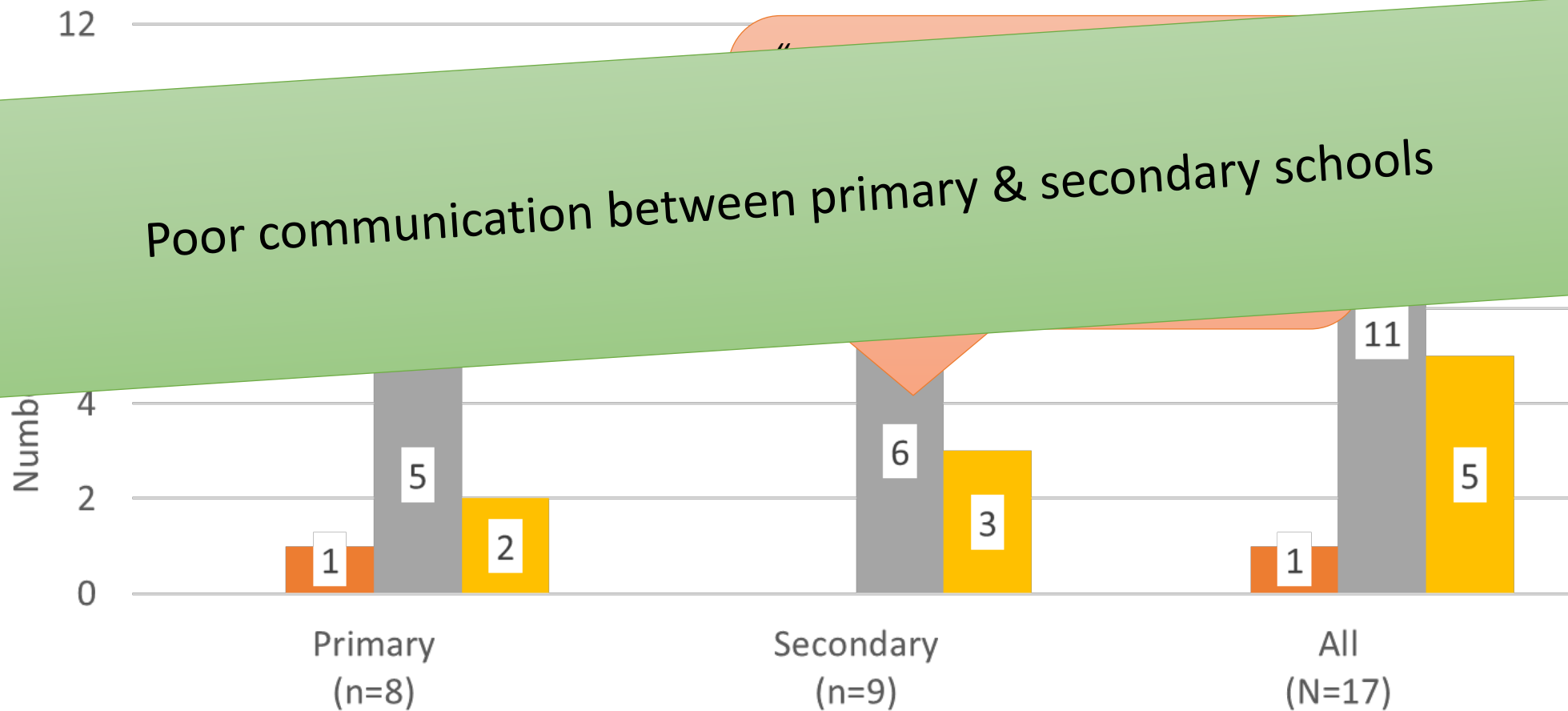
I cooperate with primary/secondary school English teachers to plan for/ensure a smooth progression for students to secondary school.



“we are not talking about what we expect them to know also with our own teachers who teach six- sixth grade, because we don’t, we don’t talk about it.”
--DK

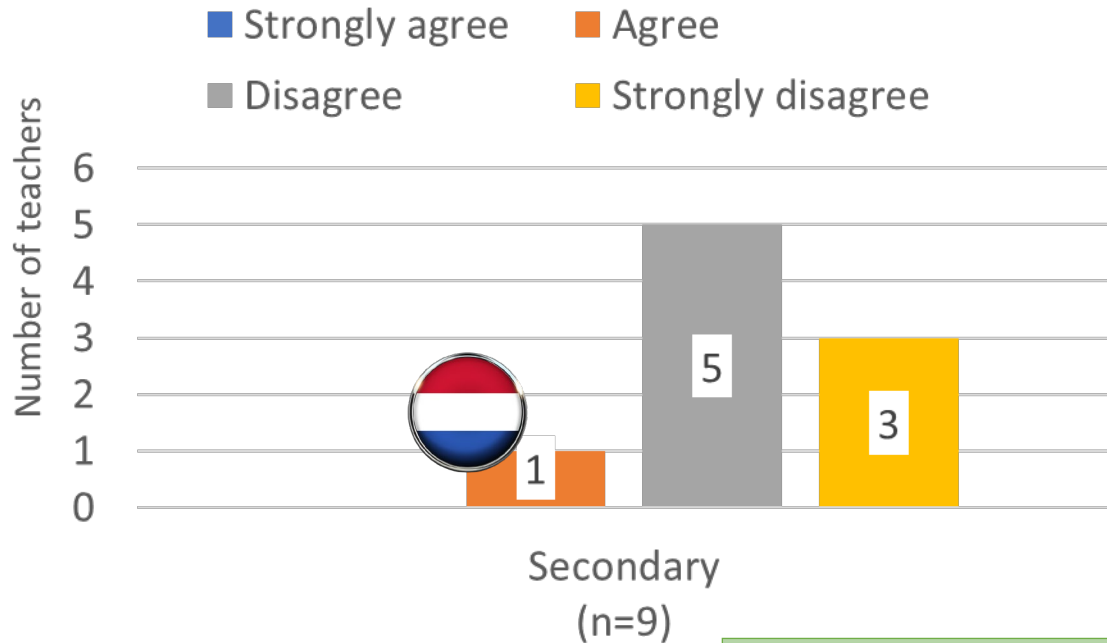
I cooperate with primary/secondary school English teachers to plan for/ensure a smooth progression for students to secondary school.

Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree



Poor communication between primary & secondary schools

I feel well informed about the English abilities of the students who come in from primary school.

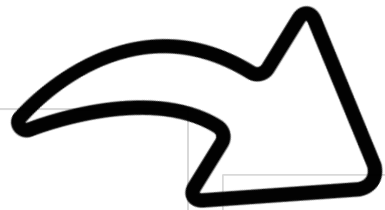
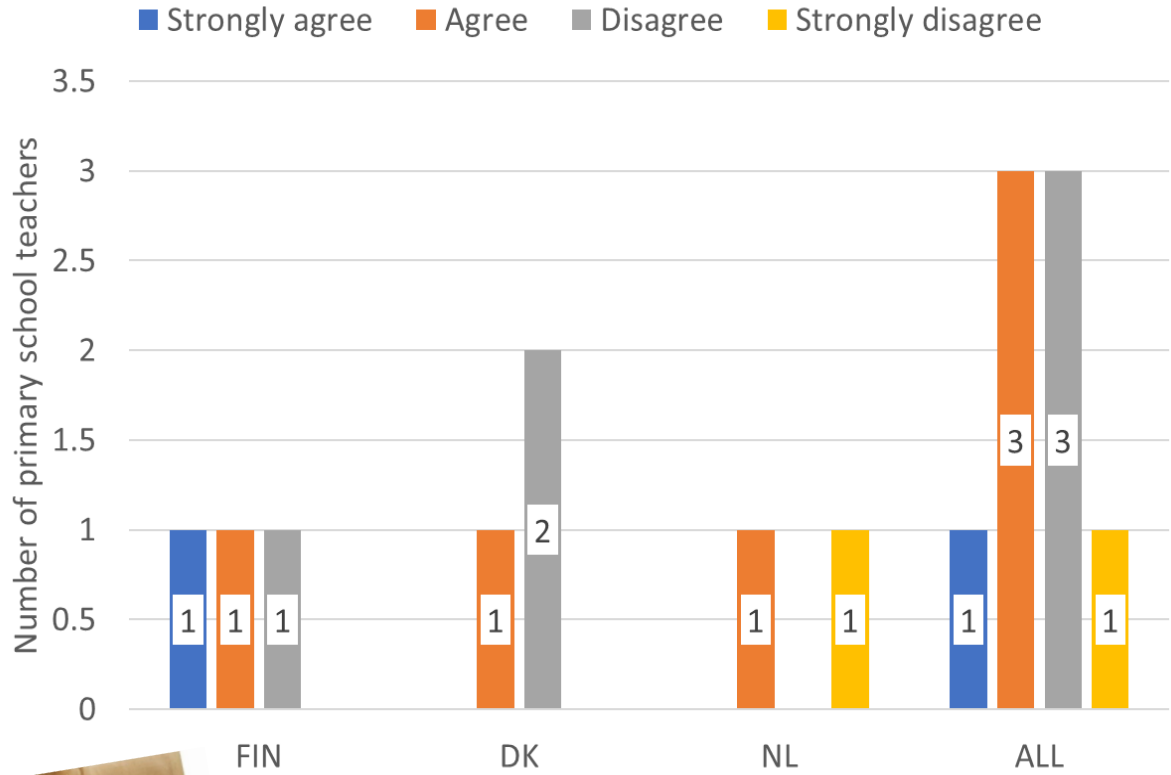


I receive information about the students' abilities before they come to my

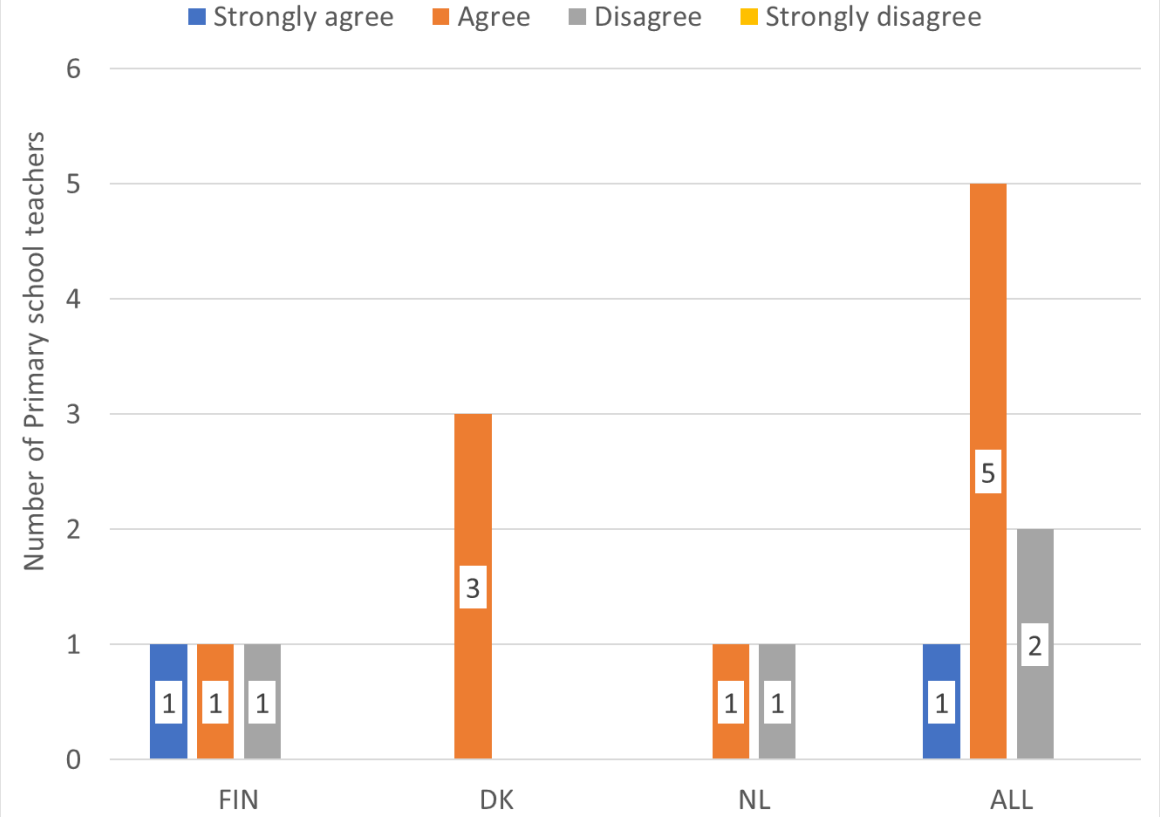


Lack of information

I am familiar with the level (or type) of English instruction at secondary schools.



I am confident that my students are well prepared for English instruction at secondary schools.



I don't do anything special.
--DK

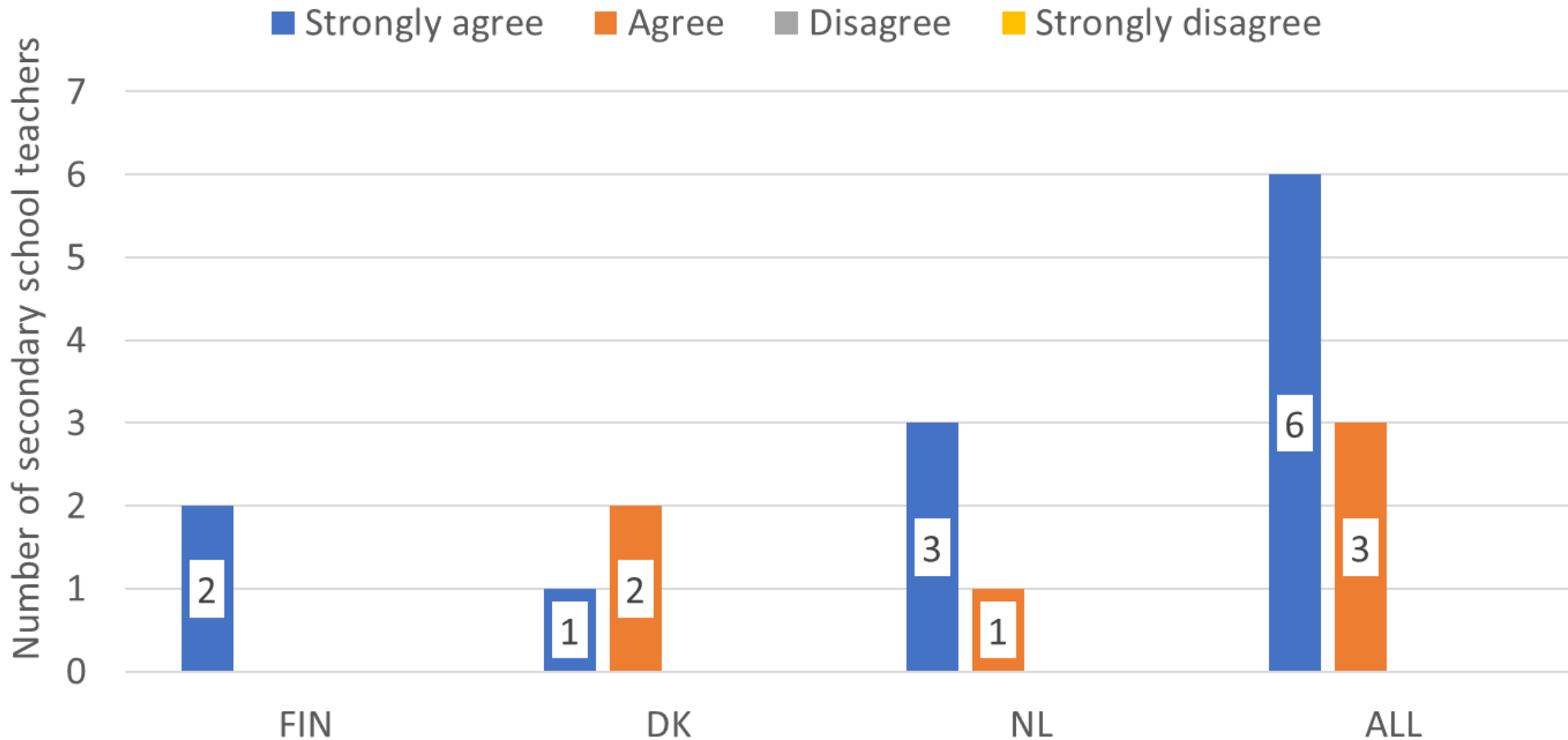
The Finnish curriculum
ensures that.
--FIN

**How do you ensure that
students progress smoothly to
secondary school English
lessons?**

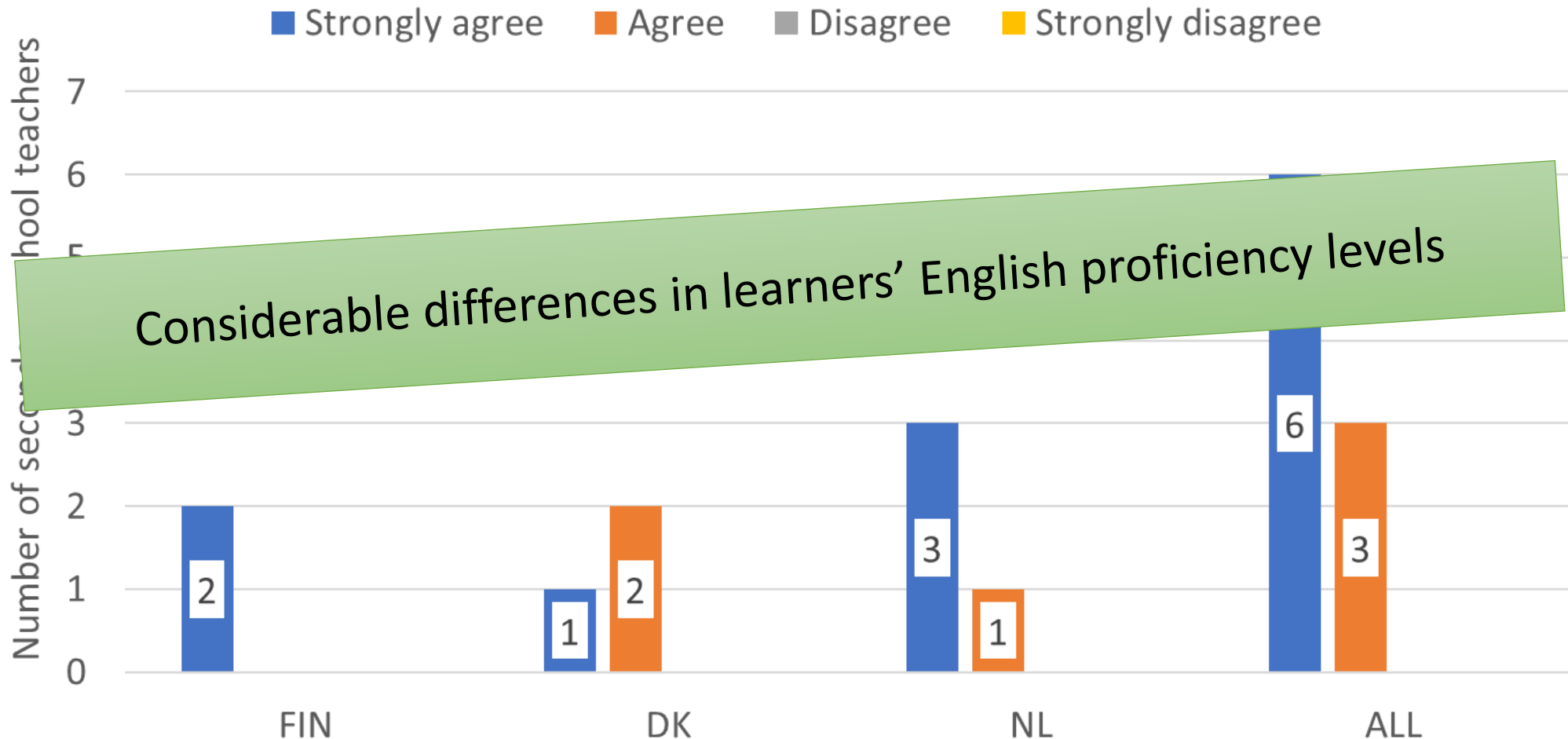
I try to prepare them for
what they can experience
and try to give them a lot of
confidence so they believe
that they can.
--DK

we give them as much confidence
as possible and a good
foundation for high school.
--NL

Students from different primary schools come with very different English abilities.



Students from different primary schools come with very different English abilities.



Reported challenges	<i>n</i>
Diverse English skills	9
Differentiating instruction	4
Low confidence in speaking English	3
Motivational issues	3
Lack of reading skills	2
Students not used too teaching and learning approaches	2
Concentration	1

Reported challenges

Diverse English skills

Differentiating instruction

speaking English

“varying levels of English in general.”

--NL

“The students are on completely different levels of english”
(sic.)

--DK

“Differences in skills and aptitudes (both language skills and learning skills).”

--FIN

4

it also depends on the teacher they had in primary school, because in our system, we don't really have a specific English teacher. You have the same teacher at a primary school [...] and they teach you biology and English and Dutch and everything. So when you have a teacher who feels slightly uncomfortable using English or, or focusing on English, and is more enthusiastic about music, it can be the case that they spend a lot of time on the other subjects and less time [...] on English.

--NL

I think the reason is that we don't, as teachers, we don't talk. [...] teachers who [...] teach fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, they don't have an idea [...] what is expected [...] when they join seventh grade.

--DK

Reported challenges

n

Diverse English skills

Differentiating instruction

Low confidence in speaking English

Motivational issues

Lack of reading skills

Students not used too teaching and learning approaches

Concentration

And they're [students] not used to – [...] they often say that they find it very, very difficult in the beginning [...] to have English in the seventh grade, because [...] it must be a very different way of teaching, and I am not sure why it's so different, what we are doing that is [...] so different.

--DK

2

2

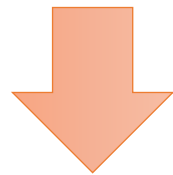
1

“My concern is a the pupils often aren't ready to secondary English classes and they aren't prepared of their own responsibility in secondary classes.”

--DK

Taking stock...

- There is a disconnect between teaching English in primary school and in secondary school—even in Finland
- Challenges reflect what is known from other educational contexts
 - Lack of communication
 - Lack of information
 - Limited understanding of the curriculum and approaches to teaching English in the adjacent school form



A system/process in need of revision

They deal with it
somehow
though...





RQ2:

How do teachers cope with potential challenges related to the transition when teaching English in the first year of secondary school?

Approaches to dealing with challenges	<i>n</i>
Getting to know learners	9
Safe, comfortable environment	4
Introducing students to methods used in secondary school	3
Clean slate approach	3
Using the TOEFL Young Student Series and other assessments	3
Using differentiating activities	2
Confidence building	2

“we have to make our way through knowing what they know”

--FIN

n

Approaches to dealing with

Getting to know learners

Safe, comfortable environment

Introducing students to methods used in second language

Clean slate approach

Using the TOEFL Young Student Series and other materials

Using differentiating activities

Confidence building

“[I] do try to [...] read them [...], to read their needs a bit. And so one student needs a bit of encouragement, the other one ... you just need [to] ask the right questions [...] I think the personal approach is always the right thing to do.”

--NL

Approaches to dealing with challenges

Getting to know learners

Safe, comfortable environment

Introducing students to methods used in secondary

Clean slate approach

Using the TOEFL Young Student Series and other

Using differentiating activities

Confidence building

“I try to build up a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom where it’s okay to make mistakes, and it’s okay to have a different accent and it’s okay to not being able to read a word.”

--DK

“to try and make sure there is a safe environment, that it is allowed to make mistakes and that English should also be fun!”

--NL

Approaches to dealing with

Getting to know learners

Safe, comfortable environment

Introducing students to methods used in secondary school

Clean slate approach

Using the TOEFL Young Student Series and other assessments

Using differentiated activities

Confidence building

"I usually tell my students that I don't want to know your past grades. I don't know them. [...] because now you're starting from [...] the beginning kind of."

--FIN

n

9

4

3

3

3

2

2

"I start from scratch and I try to meet them on their level, so they don't get the feeling of begin "behind the class".

--DK

“I think a lot of [...] teachers like to do these little tests [...] in English to test [...] tenses, [...] and then based on those results, we continue and we get to know a little what they know after primary school.”

--FIN

	<i>n</i>
Getting to know lea	9
Safe, comfortable environment	4
Introducing student to n	
Clean slate approach	
Using the TOEFL Young	
Using differentiating activ	
Confidence building	

one example was that[...] I have one girl. She's very quiet. She looks down at the table [...] I thought that she had a really hard time in English. I mean, [...] I was talking really, really slow when explaining things. And then we took the TOEFL YSS test and she was at the top. [...] so I gave her the result and I said, well, you did really, really good, you're really excellent, and now she's actually talking to me. [...] the teachers from the other school, they knew that she was excellent. So it would have been nice to know. [...] You know, I am not, I am not pointing fingers. I just say for all of our sake and for the student's sake, it would be really nice. They do it in Danish and in math, so why not in, in English?

--DK

I give extra instruction to students who have a weaker profile [...]. I stimulate reading in own levels instead of classroom-based reading. There is also an extra possibility for students to take on a flex hour in which they get more help.

--NL

enges

I've noticed that many students like to listen and watch videos, so I might show them a video about hurricanes. That's something with, with one of the classes, and then they write down what they remember from the video, and everybody can remember something at least. [...] Those are the kinds of things that nobody feels left out, I think.

--FIN

Introducing student methods used in sec

Clean slate approach

Using the TOEFL Young Student Series

Using differentiating activities

Confidence building

2

When you find out that one student is very good [...] I call him the expert [...] the expert is attending one group and then the entire group becomes an expert, and then [...] they divide themselves into the other groups, so that every group [...] becomes in the end an expert.

--NL

Main takeaways

- Exploratory study → very low n-size
- The issues around transition exist in NL, DK, FIN
- The issues that we learned about from teachers included:
 - Lack of communication/collaboration
 - Limited information
 - Limited understanding of the curriculum and approaches to teaching English in the other school form
- Teachers all deal with it on a yearly basis → teachers have untapped expertise!
 - Establishing a systematic communication between primary and secondary school teachers (Professional Learning Group—PLGs)
 - Joint curriculum planning
 - Best practices examples and strategies





Thank you very much!

Questions?

